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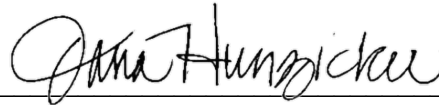
THE INFLUENCE OF CAMPUS RESOURCES ON LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

A Scholarly Research Project

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:



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## ABSTRACT

To say that there is a need for social justice is to assume that there is inequitable access to resources and unequal distribution of power (Golightly et al., 2017). Resources are needed for LGBTQ+ college students to achieve higher success rates in their programs of study (*LGBTQ+* stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning”). Many students who identify as LGBTQ+ tend to have access to fewer resources; therefore, it is necessary to help these students recognize when they need help and how to seek out available resources as soon as possible (American College Health Association, 2013). The purpose of these convergent, mixed-methods, survey-based action research study is to understand how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. Sixty-six LGBTQ+ identifying college students participated in the study. The study produced three major findings. First, campus resources played an integral role in the academic progress of college students who identified as LGBTQ+. Second, resources specific to LGBTQ+ provided adequate support for undergraduate LGBTQ+ students in the study, although some students desired additional support. Third, although many campus resources specific to LGBTQ+ are already available, some LGBTQ+ students in the study perceived a need for increased education and awareness on LGBTQ+ topics, safe spaces on campus, increased visibility, and recognition on campus. More research is needed.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Resources are needed for LGBTQ+ college students to achieve higher success rates in their programs of study. Many students who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning), tend to have access to fewer resources. For example, LGBTQ+ students may attend an educational institution that does not have resources available that are specific to their particular social-emotional needs. This, in turn, causes students to feel a lack of support, which may lead to a decline in *academic success*, defined in this study as “graduating with a completed degree.” The longer a struggling college student who identifies as LGBTQ+ goes without seeking help, the more university resources are required to support the student; therefore, it is necessary to help students recognize when they need assistance and how to seek out available resources as soon as possible to alleviate their difficulties (American College Health Association, 2013). College students who identify as LGBTQ+ may also attend an educational institution that has resources available but may be unaware of what resources are available or how to obtain these resources.

Many times, when I am working with a student who identifies as LGBTQ+ at my own higher education institution, I discover that the student is unaware of the options available to them and the support the college has in place for them. I then find myself questioning whether these students would have had an overall different college experience if they had been aware of campus resources available to them from the start. For this reason, I decided to conduct a scholarly action research project on this topic. This chapter introduces the topic of campus resources for students who identify as LGBTQ+ with a brief review of the literature; presents the study’s research problem, purpose, and questions; and describes the significance of the study.

### **Research Problem**

Discrimination, violence, and a lack of institutional protections have given the LGBTQ+ community limitations (Pryor, 2020). This raises the question of what resources are needed on college campuses to improve the experience of LGBTQ+ students. In recent years, higher education has observed an increase in the support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities (Pryor, 2020). However, even as colleges and universities continue to expand their support services for LGBTQ+ college students, this work is dependent on the buy-in and leadership of institutional stakeholders (Kuehn, 2020). Research leans toward the idea that experiencing heterosexist discrimination can contribute to poor psychological well-being in college students who identify as LGBTQ+ (Pryor, 2020). Institutional policies and resources can also affect these students' well-being and overall campus experiences (Garvey et al., 2018) with students' academic performance, campus culture, and/or programming events.

It is important for college faculty and advisors to consider the psychological state of all college students when they begin their programs of study. However, when someone from a marginalized group, such as the LGBTQ+ community, begins their academic career it is important to examine both the risks to this population of students and what protective factors are required and/or needed for LGBTQ+ college students (Bissonette & Szymanski, 2019). Given the higher rates of depression among LGBTQ+ college students (Bissonette & Szymanski, 2019), it is understood that resources for LGBTQ+ college students can potentially have a positive impact on the overall experiences and success of LGBTQ+ college students.

With gradual improvements over the decades in the organizational cultures and climates of American higher education (Broadhurst et al., 2018), including the Gay Rights Movement from the 1960s to the 1970s, attention to discrimination and equity policies in higher education

have received greater attention on college campuses. However, attention is not enough; more work from college leaders needs to occur. Advocates for the LGBTQ+ community in higher education, such as myself, continue to work to reduce discriminatory practices (Broadhurst et al., 2018; Hall, 2010). Successful policies reducing discrimination amongst the LGBTQ+ community on college campuses have led to the creation of LGBTQ+ centers and greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues within the curriculum and student affairs programming (Geller et al., 1997) of student organizations based on LGBTQ+ identity, same-sex domestic partner benefits, and the addition of sexual and gender identity to nondiscrimination policies (Broadhurst et al., 2018). These types of resources may allow college students who identify as LGBTQ+ to further explore or discover feelings of belongingness, institutional commitment, and outness (BrckaLorenz et al., 2019), which in turn, have the ability to positively impact the overall campus climate when LGBTQ+ students interpret student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions as inclusive and supportive.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this convergent mixed-methods study was to understand how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. To accomplish this purpose, the study sought to identify the campus resources available to students who identify as LGBTQ+ on one college campus, how these students were made aware of these resources, what resources these students utilized most often, and how their use of these resources impacted them. This study was guided by three research questions: 1) Do appropriate resources have a positive influence on undergraduate LGBTQ+ students? 2) Why do LGBTQ+ specific resources provide this support? 3) What do students need and/or want in order to be successful in their programs of study?

### **Significance of the Study**

Policies and resources are also a pivotal part of the college environment and a key component of heterosexism, yet they have not been sufficiently studied among LGBTQ+ college students (Pitcher et al., 2018). This study offers additional supporting evidence for the positive impact of campus resources for LGBTQ+ college students.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the topic of campus resources for students who identify as LGBTQ+ with a brief review of the literature; presented the study's research problem, purpose, and questions; and described the significance of the study. Chapter 2 will present a detailed literature review on the topic. Chapter 3 will describe the study's research methodology and methods. Chapter 4 will present the study's findings and results, and Chapter 5 will draw conclusions, discuss implications for practice, and make recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Resources are needed for LGBTQ+ college students to achieve higher success rates in their programs of study. Many students who identify as LGBTQ+ tend to have access to fewer resources; therefore, it is necessary to help these students recognize when they need help and how to seek out available resources as soon as possible (American College Health Association, 2013). This chapter establishes a foundation for the study by reviewing the scholarly literature related to campus resources and LGBTQ+ college students, including characteristics of LGBTQ+ college students, discrimination, and LGBTQ+ college students, and institutional policies, programs, and resources for LGBTQ+ college students.

#### **Characteristics of LGBTQ+ College Students**

LGBTQ+ college students report feeling low perceptions of peer belonging, social adjustment, and individual well-being in comparison with non-LGBTQ+ students (Johnson et al., 2021). Considering that LGBTQ+ students' emotions, belonging, and learning are closely linked (Moore, 2016), research has shown that genuineness of relationships is highly important for LGBTQ+ students. LGBTQ+ students may align with other students regarding confidence in academics and performance (Johnson et al., 2021), and may contribute to positive learning experiences on campus.

In college, student success continues to be important as it relates directly to what students will experience as they move into graduate studies and into the professional world (Wimberly, 2015). LGBTQ+ college students may face several obstacles that can hold back achievement and academic success throughout their academic careers. Current research focuses on the difficulties that LGBTQ+ students may face while enrolled in college (Wimberly, 2015). According to

Wilson and Liss (2022), LGBTQ+ college students are at greater risk of having mental health difficulties when compared to non-LGBTQ+ college students; these include self-doubt, shame, lack of self-esteem, and loss of interest when LGBTQ+ college students are disconnected from their authentic selves (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Flores & Sheely-Moore, 2020).

### **Discrimination and LGBTQ+ College Students**

*Heterosexist discrimination* is defined as “experiences of harassment, rejection, and unfair treatment because of the individual’s sexual orientation” (Szymanski, 2006, p. 13), and is sometimes termed *homophobia* (Dunn & Szymanski, 2018, p. 13). The use of the term *heterosexist discrimination* offers a more inclusive and broad range to further identify similar forms of oppression within the LGBTQ+ community (Dunn & Szymanski, 2018). For example, Dunn and Szymanski (2018) explain:

If someone experiences heterosexist discrimination but has high levels of internalized heterosexism, they may avoid being close to LGBQ others because it reminds them of their own “shameful” sexuality. In addition, outness might moderate this relationship; perhaps it is individuals who are more open about their sexual orientation who seek out more LGBQ connection in response to heterosexist discrimination. Finally, it could simply be that heterosexist discrimination is not related to connection with the LGBQ community. Clearly, future research examining this link and its conflicting findings is warranted. (Dunn & Szymanski, 2018)

Research shows that experiencing heterosexist discrimination can be a factor leading to the impaired mental health of LGBTQ+ undergraduate college students (Almeida et al., 2013). Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) suggests that LGBTQ+ students experience increased rates of mental health issues due to the chronic stress associated with heterosexism. Results from

Wilson and Liss's study (2022) support this theory due to LGBTQ+ college students being at an elevated risk of increased psychological distress; specifically, lower levels of safety, belonging, and happiness, and higher levels of depression and anxiety in comparison to non-LGBTQ+ college students. These students may then benefit from increased support from the college. This support includes programming and/or outreach specifically designed for LGBTQ+ students on campus.

For example, there is a perception within society that a survivor of a bias incident will not engage in a confidential process of reporting the incident, due to a fear of not being believed by the appropriate authorities (Briones-Robinson et al., 2016). This may create a barrier for LGBTQ+ students in reporting bias-related incidents on campus. If LGBTQ+ college students feel unsupported by the processes (or the lack thereof) in place at their institutions, then this may be a result of college leaders' failure to create a safe campus climate and appropriate support for LGBTQ+ college students (Courtney et al., 2021). While colleges can serve as an overall supportive resource for LGBTQ+ college students, the institutional failure of providing appropriate resources and environments contributes to an experience of discrimination due to gendered resources and spaces on campus that are already in place (Pryor, 2018), which may impact LGBTQ+ students' academic success.

Heterosexism is manifested at individual and structural levels within an institution (Meyer, 2003); therefore, influence from college and university leaders is critical. It is, of course, understood that higher education leaders want to support students; however, current research suggests that LGBTQ+ college students often face a negative campus climate (Rankin et al., 2010), including harassment and discriminatory incidents. Higher education institutions should institutionalize LGBTQ+ resources and services (Pitcher et al., 2018) and supportive policies; for

example, a nondiscrimination policy or statement that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. As Pitcher et al. (2018) have explained, policies do not stop discriminatory incidents from occurring; however, when support is provided by the higher education institution, this can demonstrate institutional values and support to the LGBTQ+ students.

## **Institutional Policies, Programs, and Resources for LGBTQ+ College Students**

### ***Policies for LGBTQ+ College Students***

LGBTQ+ students receive support from policies, programs, and services offered by their educational institutions (Camacho et al., 2018). However, systemic factors have received little support for this population of students (Woodford et al., 2018). When systemic change is initiated, it is often met with immobility or resistance/pushback (Kotter & Cohen, 2002) from institutional leaders. One factor is that higher education institutions continue to encounter financial disparities within campus budgets and accountability demands from federal and state policymakers (Kelchen, 2018; Linley et al., 2020). Additionally, these institutions may also lack the knowledge or experience from staff to provide adequate support to minority-identifying students, including the development of supportive policies and procedures (Nguyen et al., 2020).

In creating equitable policies and experiences on campus for LGBTQ+ students, college leaders should better understand what supports LGBTQ+ students desire to achieve academic success. For example, college leaders must consider the challenges policy makers may be confronted with in creating an educational environment that is inclusive and welcoming to all students. As Kuehn (2020) explained:

“The ethic of critique exposes the inequity of marginalization by redefining and reframing “other concepts such as privilege, power, culture, language, and even justice”



(Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 14). Simply stated, it is unethical to allow some groups a place at the table while denying other groups the same level of access. Leaders in education who are guided by a strong sense of ethics do not consider it acceptable to allow policies and practices to perpetuate inequities. They disrupt the status quo by challenging such policies and working towards greater inclusivity. These are the leaders who take risks by pointing out flaws and challenging those who resist acknowledging the necessity of change. These are the educators who prioritize democratic values over self-interest. These are the people who advocate for the well-being of all students. (Kuehn, 2020)

Ethics is a central component of moral education (Noddings, 1995; Kuehn, 2020), and is a challenge educational leaders may encounter when developing policies with LGBTQ+ college students as a focus. An ethical foundation allows for a productive and collaborative decision-making process amongst college leaders in higher education.

### ***Programming and Resources for LGBTQ+ College Students***

Policies within a higher educational institution, in combination with resources and programming, may have an influence on LGBTQ+ students' well-being and their experiences of their college campus. Pitcher et al. (2018) has explained that higher education institutions can make a significant impact on LGBTQ+ college students' academic successes with the development and implementation of services that provide this support. This involves creating safe spaces for LGBTQ+ groups on campus, sponsoring social and/or educational events, and working with these groups and events to better analyze and understand the impact of campus climate on LGBTQ+ college students (Pitcher et al., 2018).

LGBTQ+ resource centers are another supportive resource for this population of students

and help ensure an inclusive and supportive environment. Pitcher (2018) has encouraged institutions to develop supportive environments and to create important improvements in policies, programs, and services that make them inclusive of LGBTQ+ students. This can lead to an increased sense of belonging and may create improved outcomes for LGBTQ+ college students (e.g., graduation, increased academic performance, well-being) (Pitcher, 2018). In one study, participants understood there was a lack of support for LGBTQ+ students and this prevented them from reporting incidents they encountered to campus officials (Courtney et al., 2021). Findings from another study suggest that the presence of gay-straight alliances (GSAs), is linked with significantly increased perceptions of safety (Kane et al., 2010).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter was a review of the literature and research guiding this study, including characteristics of LGBT+ college students; discrimination and LGBTQ+ college students; and institutional policies, programs, and resources. Chapter 3 will review the design of the study and its research methodology.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHDOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to better understand how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) Do appropriate resources have a positive influence on undergraduate LGBTQ+ students? 2) Why do LGBTQ+ specific resources provide this support? 3) What do students need and/or want in order to be successful in their programs? This chapter will discuss the study's research problem, along with its purpose and questions, research methodology, research context, data collection, data analysis, and the researcher's positionality.

#### **Research Methodology**

##### **Mixed Methods Research**

The data from this study were collected using a convergent, mixed-methods research methodology. According to Mertler (2019), mixed methods is useful for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data within one study. The mixed-methods approach was beneficial to understanding the research problem in this study because collecting both qualitative and quantitative data allows for a more complete analysis of the study's data. Specifically, this study sought to identify the campus resources available to students who identify as LGBTQ+ on one college campus, how these students were made aware of these resources, what resources these students utilized most often, and how their use of these resources impacted them.

##### ***Qualitative Data***

In qualitative research, the text and image data are analyzed using unique steps and diverse designs (Mertler, 2019). Qualitative data focuses on descriptions, perceptions, and

thoughts (Creswell & Creswell, 1988). In the qualitative aspect of this study's research design, I gathered textual data in the form of open-ended comments through a variety of survey questions. The survey I used in the study was original (rather than duplicated from previous research) to provide a unique vantage point. I wanted to collect qualitative data to provide an outlet that would allow me to understand participants' experiences in-depth.

Qualitative research also generates information about the human or ethical side of an issue, which is important when research is related to the LGBTQ+ community because qualitative data can additionally provide a generous and detailed amount of data and allow for student voices to be heard concerning their experiences on campus (Pitcher et al., 2018). In this study, qualitative research allowed me to use written-response questions to collect this data. Specifically, the written-response questions in this study required participants to discuss their beliefs, opinions, and perceptions regarding how campus resources influenced their progress as LGBTQ+ identifying college students throughout their undergraduate academic careers. Participants' qualitative responses provided information about the personal experiences and vantage points of college students who identify as LGBTQ+.

### ***Quantitative Data***

In quantitative research, the data collected focuses on numbers, such as frequencies and percentages. Quantitative data is collected and measured in order to produce statistical measurements that can be used to help explain findings from the qualitative data (Fetters et al., 2013), and is displayed by bar graphs, pie charts, and tables. Quantitative data has a value or numerical measurement attached in order to show the data and avoid any distortion of what the data says. Specifically, where there is a large set of numeric data, it is beneficial to organize it and break it down into smaller intervals for clarity and organizational purposes (e.g., a frequency

table). Bar graphs are also useful when presenting quantitative data because the measurement itself can be displayed and easily interpreted (Brase & Brase, 2009). However, one limitation of quantitative data is the possibility of a skewed vantage point, which then influences the clarity of the numerical display and/or creates a congested graphic that is used to describe the data (Brase & Brase, 2009).

This study presented participants with eight closed-ended survey questions. These survey questions included rating scales, multiple-choice questions, and *yes or no* questions. Four of the eight closed-ended questions included the ability for participants to further explain their answers if they felt it necessary. Participants' quantitative responses provided information about participants' identities with the LGBTQ+ community, resources utilized, and the frequency of resource utilization. Additionally, the quantitative data supported the findings from the qualitative data.

### ***Convergent, Mixed-Methods Research Design***

Convergent, mixed methods was the research design used to conduct this study. This is where both qualitative and quantitative data is collected, analyzed, and then the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data is compared to see if the findings and results support or contradict one another (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This model allows the researcher to collect and analyze the data separately, but at the same time, to combine the different results during the interpretation process by comparing both the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2011).

I felt that merging quantitative and qualitative data to have the ability to analyze both forms of data simultaneously was the best approach for this study. Both types of data complemented and mutually implicated each other and assisted in further understanding how campus resources influenced the progress of undergraduate college students who identified as

LGBTQ+. Additionally, this approach allowed me to use the qualitative data to evaluate the reliability of the quantitative data and provide further analysis of the data collected. The benefits of the convergent, mixed-methods, survey-based, action-research design is evident in this research study from the data collected from the survey.

### **Action Research**

An action-research approach was used to execute the study's convergent, mixed-methods, survey-based action research study. According to Cunningham (2008):

An important aspect of action research is the tie between the practices (pedagogy) and the social situation (the particular classroom) in which they occur. The inquiry is an attempt to understand the rationale and improve the success of certain practices within the specific context of the practices (the classroom environment). (Cunningham, 2008, pp. 2-3)

Action research provides an interactive, systemic, and analytic way to reflect on a topic or phenomenon in a researcher's direct setting and provides the opportunity for the practitioner-researchers to better understand and apply the data collected (Cunningham, 2008). Action research is a process that improves education by incorporating change through the application of a study's findings and/or results (Mertler, 2019). Action research is well-established in the field of education. Over half a century ago, Wolff and Wolff (1955) noted that action research is focused on practical problems that participants encounter daily and throughout their lives, and the research occurs in the field rather than inside a lab.

The importance of action research is that it assists in connecting theory to practice by helping to bridge gaps between what was learned and what is put into practice by creating a two-way flow of information (Mertler, 2020). I believe that action research is useful when studying the

LGBTQ+ community because it allows the researcher to provide support for participants during the study and affords an opportunity to create equal and equitable learning environments for students within marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ students following the study.

### ***Practical Action Research***

All action research is a process that improves education by incorporating change-focused, open-minded, and cyclical analysis of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting (Merlter, 2020). One goal of action research is to identify problems and create a plan of action with strategies to address the issue(s) and development of best practices. According to (Calderon et al., (2014), data triangulation increases the validity and credibility of results and provides necessary information to guide the researcher to an additional cycle of reflection and the development of a new plan of action; it also allows for thoroughness of the process.

Practical-action research goes one step further, developing practical reasoning to improve useful knowledge (Kemmis et al., 2014, p.11; Manfra, 2019, p. 167). These factors influenced my research design because I wanted to better understand how campus resources influenced the progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. I wanted to address a specific problem within higher education that affects a specific group within the college, and practical-action research allowed for this. Therefore, practical-action research was the specific form of action research that I utilized for this study.

## **Research Context**

### **Research Site**

This study was only made available to students at one private college in an urban area located in central Illinois. This college currently serves nearly 6,000 undergraduate and graduate students from the United States and the international community. The specific educational

institution and the identity of the participants in this study will not be revealed for confidentiality purposes.

### **Research Participants**

Participants in this study included undergraduate self-identifying LGBTQ+ students. All participation in this study was completed on a voluntary basis. Participants accessed the survey via a link published in a campus announcement, a free service provided by the Student Activities office at the college. Students had the option to not participate with no penalty. (See Appendix A.) Members at the research site included traditional undergraduate students at a research institution. This site is located in an urban area with students attending from around the United States and the international community.

### **Participant Selection**

All participation was completed on a voluntary basis and participants received no compensation for participation. A link was published to students via the campus newsletter, a free service provided by the Student Affairs Office, allowing students to access the survey. The link to the survey was posted and students had the option to not participate with no penalty. To post the survey to the campus newsletter, I submitted a request for posting and included information from the survey to recruit participants. The posting provided a detailed description including an introduction, what was required for participation, benefits and risks for participants, confidentiality, and how the results would be used. This posting also informed students that participation would not include compensation and that the survey would be completed on a voluntary basis, along with contact information, if any questions, concerns, or issues were to arise.



If students chose to continue with the survey, they would then be brought to the consent form attached to the survey link (see Appendix B) via Qualtrics, where the participant would then proceed with the survey if consent was given.

## **Research Methods**

### **Data Collection**

#### ***Survey Research***

Surveys are widely used in quantitative research. This is because they provide a measurable description of the trends, attitudes, and opinions of a group (Mertler, 2019). A survey design was used in this research. The main purpose of the survey was to evaluate whether resources available on campus influenced the progress of LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. A type of a descriptive research design, survey research gathers information from participants identified with a specific group (or regarding that group), including their opinions, attitudes, or characteristics, by asking specific questions identifying the concern and then tabulating responses (Mertler, 2019). Surveys allow the researcher to gather large amounts, and a variety of information quickly (Johnson, 2008). It is important to mention the limitations of utilizing survey research. For example, “survey research simply takes a ‘snapshot’ of the issue being studied” (Mertler, 2019), and may not grasp all contributing factors to the issue.

The survey was comprised of 13 total questions, including multiple-choice questions, *yes* or *no* questions, rating scales, and open-ended written responses. It was important to include open-ended questions because they may invite unanticipated, additional information from participants, which may not have been captured in other close-ended questions (Mertler, 2019). Survey data was collected in the Spring 2022 semester between January 2022 to April 2022 using an online survey via Qualtrics Surveys, a web-based survey software. The surveys were

completed on a voluntary basis and participants were free to complete the survey on their own time.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis included descriptive analysis for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Data analysis for this study occurred from April 2022 to June 2022.

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

Descriptive statistics are specific methods utilized to calculate, describe, and summarize quantitative data in a logical, meaningful, and efficient way. Graphic displays, such as bar graphs, tables, and pie charts, are used in combination with the quantitative measures to allow for clarity and serve as a visual aide. Additionally, descriptive statistics make the conversation of raw data into a form to easily understand and interpret data that lays the foundation for analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Simply put, descriptive statistics include numerical measurements or graphic techniques that are used to organize and describe the characteristics of a data set (Fisher & Marshall, 2009).

Descriptive statistics was utilized in this study. Sixty-six surveys were collected at one higher education institution, and descriptive statistics was used to break down the population of LGBTQ+ college student thoroughly to describe the sample set of the 66 participants in this study (n=66). In total, 76 % (m=76) of participants identified within the LGBTQ+ community.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

This study utilized thematic analysis to examine the qualitative and open-ended survey questions from this study. Thematic analysis is a method utilized for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The goal of thematic analysis is to understand the meaning of an issue or issues and/or the significance of the problem

(Braun & Clarke, 2006) and it allows for flexibility in the analysis of data, provides a structure for the organization of themes, and assists in interpreting the research topic.

I began by extracting the data from Qualtrics to an Excel document and completed a review to ensure accuracy of data transferred from Qualtrics to the Excel document. I then printed the Excel document for review to identify significant patterns, terms/language, and themes that could be discovered throughout the participants responses to the open-ended survey questions. I then color-coded emerging themes to generate initial codes. This process in the analysis was needed in order to reduce the amount of data to a set of codes. The initial codes were:

- Safety on campus (SOC)
- Support from faculty and staff (SFS)
- Increased awareness (INA)
- Training and education for faculty and staff (TAE)
- Awareness of programming and services (APS)
- Visibility on campus (VOC)
- Access to services (ACS)
- Lack of representation (LRE)
- Representation on campus (ROC)
- Increased programming and services (IPS)

I then analyzed and organized the codes to identify themes. I used this as the basis for organizing the codes and themes to further reduce the amount of data into a set of themes. The emerging themes were:

- Safety and openness on campus

- Safety and support on campus
- Recognition, awareness, and education
- Availability and access
- Education and training

First, I read through the codes for each theme and determined if there was a pattern throughout that code. I then placed themes in relation to the collected data to ensure themes were clearly defined by their meaning. The final step included analyzing the data and writing the findings of the open-ended survey questions. While writing the findings of the qualitative data, I continued to organize the codes to create an argument in relation to the research questions and to provide further context beyond the initial codes.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Research positionality influences how research is conducted and its outcomes and results (Rowe, 2014), and essentially what a researcher chooses to further explore. A fixed aspect of positionality includes personal life-history and experiences that are more fluid, subjective, and contextual (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

As an individual who identifies within the LGBTQ+ community, I understand the difficulties in navigating higher education with a lack of resources for LGBTQ+ college students. However, as time and society have progressed, I lack an understanding of what it is like to be an LGBTQ+ identifying college student currently in higher education. I wanted to understand whether LGBTQ+ specific resources have a positive influence on this population of college students.

While completing my undergraduate degree I did not have access to any LGBTQ+ specific resources on campus. Additionally, throughout my professional career within higher

education I have encountered many LGBTQ+ identifying college students who were unaware of institutional policies, programs, and resources in place for this community. A combination of personal and professional experiences influenced my decision to conduct a scholarly action-research project on how resources influence the progress of LGBTQ+ college students. Additionally, my positionality within this study influenced my decision to not use predetermined codes in order to avoid potential researcher bias when coding the data.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter was a review of the study design and research methodology, research context, data collection, data analysis, and researcher positionality. Chapter 4 will cover review of the data analysis, results, and findings in-depth.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this action-research study was to explore how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. Three research questions guided the study: 1) Do appropriate resources have a positive influence on undergraduate LGBTQ+ students? 2) Why do LGBTQ+ specific resources provide this support? 3) What do students need and/or want in order to be successful in their programs? Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of the quantitative data, while the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This chapter presents the results of the study's converged qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The first section presents information on the demographics of the study's student participants. The second section presents results on student participants' campus resource utilization and support. The third section presents results on the adequacy of campus support. The chapter closes with a discussion around the study's three research questions.

#### Participant Demographics

Sixty-six undergraduate college students who identified as LGBTQ+ participated in this study by responding to an anonymous, online survey. Analysis of participants' demographic data revealed that 27 of the 66 respondents (41%) identified as cisgender, 16 of the respondents (24%) did not identify as cisgender, and 13 of the respondents (20%) identified as having another gender aside from male and female. Ten of the study's 66 respondents (15%) did not answer this survey question (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Cisgender Identification*

Variable	Options	Participants	Percentage
Cisgender	No	16	24%
	Other	13	20%
	Yes	27	41%
	No Response	10	15%
Total		66	100%

Fifty of the 66 respondents (76%) identified with the LGBTQ+ community and seven of the respondents (11%) did not identify as LGBTQ+. Ten respondents (14%) did not answer this survey question (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Demographic Information of Respondents*

Variable	Options	Participants	Percentage
Identification with LGBTQ+	No	6	11%
	Yes	50	76%
	No Response	10	14%
Total		66	100%

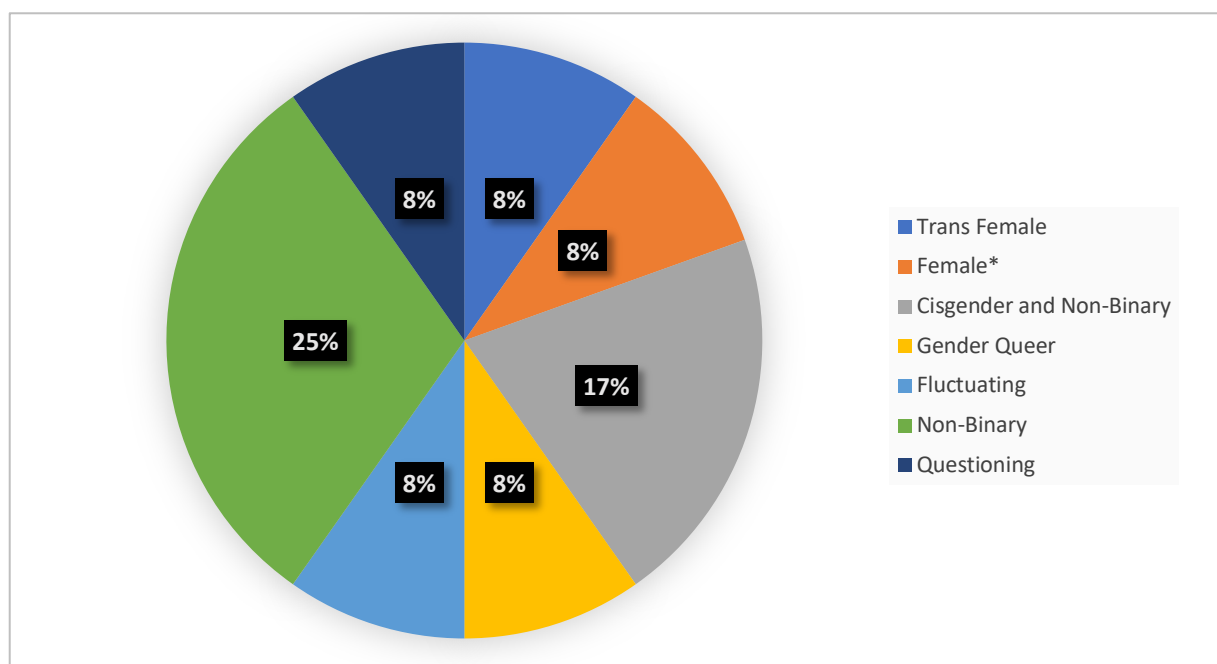
Of the respondents who identified as non-cisgender and provided further explanation to their identification, one student (8%) identified as a trans female, one student (8%) identified as female\*, two students (17%) identified as cisgender and non-binary, one student (8%) identified as genderqueer, one student (8%) identified as fluctuating but usually female, three students (25%) identified as non-binary, one student (8%) questioned labels akin to demi girl and non-binary woman, and one was still questioning their gender identity (see Figure 1) .

Overall, the participant demographic data suggests that a majority of participants, at 76%, identify within the LGBTQ+ community. While ten respondents (14%) did not provide a

response, these results show diversity amongst the LGBTQ+ community regarding gender, identity, and how college students identify with these characteristics. Participants who did not provide a response may have been uncomfortable answering this question, unsure of how they identified, or may have lacked knowledge regarding sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Figure 1**

*Non-cisgender Specified Identities*



*Note.* \* Participant disclosed they do not believe in gender and their sex is female; therefore, they are a woman.

Only 13 of the 66 respondents (20%) were freshmen, one of the respondents (2%) was a graduate student, 18 of the respondents (27%) were in their junior year, 12 of the respondents (18%) were in their senior year, and 14 of the respondents (21%) were in their sophomore year. Eight participants (12%) did not answer this survey question (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*School Year Enrollment*



Variable	Options	Participants	Percentage
School Year	Freshman	13	20%
	Graduate	1	2%
	Junior	18	27%
	Senior	12	18%
	Sophomore	14	21%
	No Response	8	12%
Total		66	100%

Based on the participant sample, these participant demographics provided a foundational understanding of the LGBTQ+ community campus-wide at the study's research site and provide a visual to understand the varying identities and the academic years of the participants. The utilization of campus resources by participants will be discussed in the next section.

### **Campus Resource Utilization**

Analysis of student respondents' resource utilization and support reveals that 42 of the 66 respondents (64%) made use of provided campus resources while 13 of the respondents (20%) indicated that they did not make use of available campus resources. Eleven students (17%) did not respond to the survey question (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

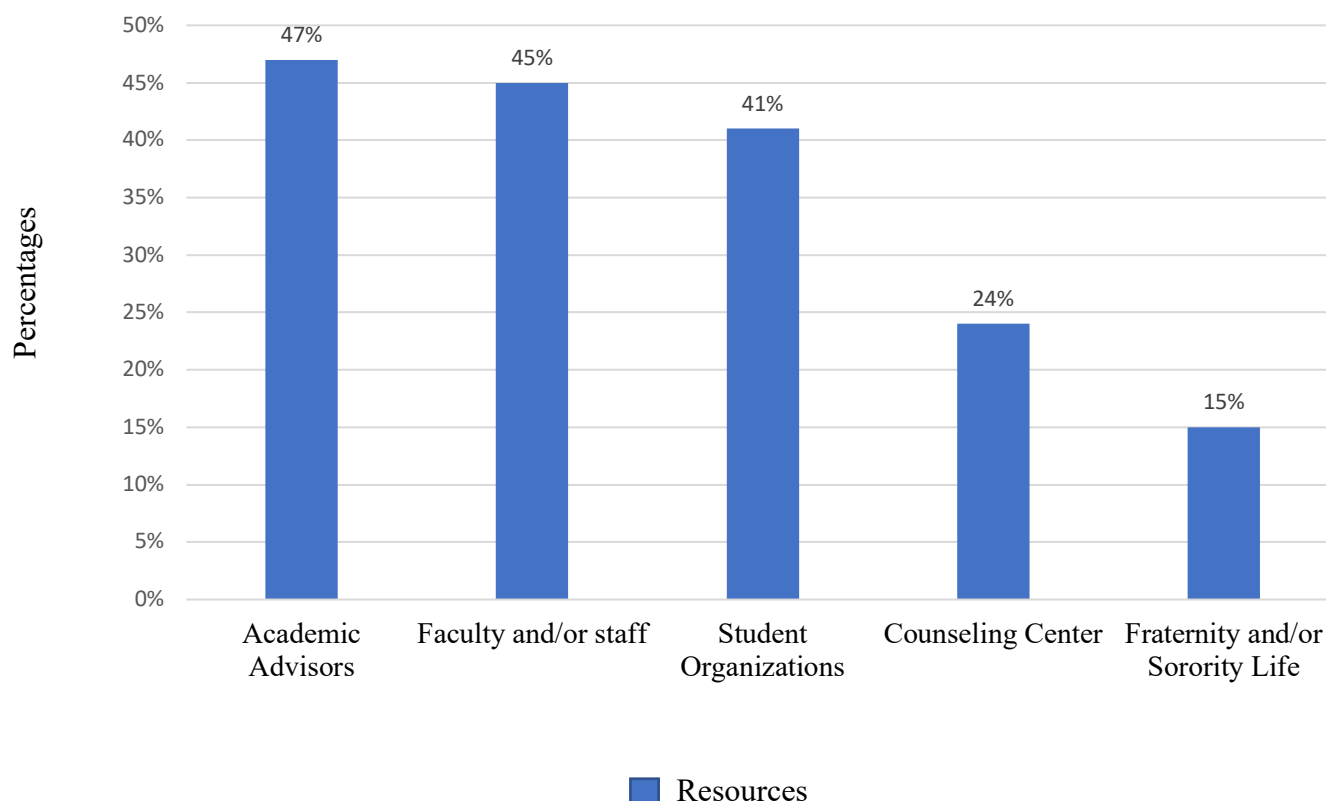
#### *Participant Resource Utilization*

Resources Utilization	Frequency	Percentage
No	13	20%
Yes	42	64%
No Response	11	17%
Total	66	100%

Of the campus resources available to LGBTQ+ students, academic advisors were sought out as a resource by 31 of the 66 respondents (47%), faculty and/or staff were consulted as resources by 30 of the respondents (45%), and student organizations were used as a resource by 27 of the respondents (41%). The campus counseling center was consulted as a resource by 16 of the respondents (24%), fraternity and/or sorority life was a resource used by ten respondents (15%), engagement in campus leadership and service activities was a resource for six of the respondents (9%), and campus religious life was a resource used by four of the respondents (6%). The campus Athletic Department, Diversity and Inclusion Office, Honors Program, Student Academic Services, and teaching assistants (TAs) were each utilized as a resource by one respondent (2%). All resources, except for academic advisors, faculty, and/or staff, students' organizations, and the counseling center were, on average, used by the LGBTQ+ student respondents once per semester. Respondents used the Diversity and Inclusion Office and Student Academic Services about once per month, while the Honors Program was used annually (see Figure 2).

## **Figure 2**

### *Most Utilized Campus Resources*



Participating students' campus resource usage data suggests that faculty and staff are one of the most impactful resources that have assisted LGBTQ+ students pursuing their academic goals. One participant who identified as non-cisgender but did not disclose their sexual orientation disclosed that they fully utilized the faculty on campus as a resource. This student wrote, "I've learned everything I can from my professors, talked extensively with my [academic] advisor to make sure I can make the most of my time [in college], and have often attended Common Grounds Club." The Common Ground Club is the institution's LGBTQ+/straight alliance, and the goal of this group is to create a welcoming environment on campus to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills for members of the college campus about the LGBTQ+ community. Another campus organization, the Gay Alliance SafeZone program, aims to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills for individuals and address the challenges that exist when one wants to be an advocate for LGBTQ+ individuals in their lives.

Academic advisors were identified as one of the most impactful resources that have assisted participating students in reaching their academic benchmarks. There was a consensus among the 66 LGBTQ+ students in the study that academic advisors had provided substantial support in navigating their programs of study, including things like selecting which courses to take and when to take them. One participant explained that their academic advisor assisted in navigating different scenarios and suggested who or where to direct certain questions.

Importantly, the need for LGBTQ+ informed counselors and staff was revealed in the data. This included the need for faculty and staff to better understand how to treat students who identify as LGBTQ+ equally and equitably, and how to provide an inclusive learning environment for these students. Some participants asserted the need for the institution to provide resources with the dedicated purpose of educating others on transgender issues. Others suggested the development and implementation of a policy of allowing students to change their name, as well as the need for gender-inclusive housing and gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. One student wrote, “Not necessarily resources, but more so a ‘feel’ around campus that everyone here is inclusive.” Campus support will be further discussed in the next section.

## **Campus Support for LGBTQ+ College Students**

### ***Adequacy of Current Campus Resources***

Regarding campus support, only 26 of the 66 respondents (39%) indicated that the level of support provided on campus was adequate, while 18 of the respondents (27%) indicated that the support level was inadequate. Twenty-two of the respondents (33%) did not provide a response, which could indicate that these participants do not utilize resources or perhaps these participants were unsure how to measure the level of adequacy of resources. Regarding student respondents’ feelings of support, 20 of the respondents (30%) felt supported or strongly

supported, two of the respondents (3%) felt the support was not adequate, and 13 of the respondents (20%) felt indifferent about the support level. One student (2%) did not provide a response.

A significant percentage of respondents, 39%, believed that the available campus resources were sufficient in supporting LGBTQ+ students on campus. However, some of the respondents included in the 39% believed that more could be done to further support this community. These conflicting data suggest that current campus resources may be applicable to LGBTQ+ individuals, but additional education, training, and programming may be needed to better support and provide adequate support on campus to LGBTQ+ students. For example, some student participants called for more programming and materials about gender inclusivity to be made available on campus. Their reasoning was that widely available information about gender inclusivity would help to eliminate on-campus discrimination and neutralize the campus climate. However, no students in this study reported that they had experienced discrimination in the classroom because of their gender. Rather, the majority of student participants expressed the need for overall LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for faculty and staff.

Two current campus resources - Common Ground and Gay Alliance SafeZone - were identified by several respondents as supportive campus resources that should be made more visible on campus. One participant stated, "I think helping Common Ground become more visible would be a great thing to do for the queer Bradley students."

Lastly, several of the participants called for the need for more LGBTQ+ campus infrastructure support. Included in their calls were gender-neutral bathrooms and dormitories that accommodate those who identify as non-binary. According to Marine et al.,(2019), there has been a growing visibility of LGBTQ+ students advocating for change around the conventional

practice of binary-gender-assigned housing in place since the early 20th century. Some participants were enthusiastic and would welcome more on-campus support for LGBTQ+ students. One participant who identified as non-cisgender and did not disclose their sexual orientation added, “More help within the health center [is needed] as well as more information on the LGBT community so more people are aware of what [campus resources are] available to them.”

When participants were asked about their use of campus and off-campus resources and support, 14 of the 66 respondents (21%) indicated that both campus and off-campus resources have influenced their academic success, and 12 of the respondents (18%) highlighted that only campus resources have been beneficial. One participant explained, “I’ve gone to [the college’s] Counseling Center, which has helped me put some pieces of my life together and helped me focus more in my academic life.”

Seven of the respondents (11%) indicated that only off-campus resources have been influential. In contrast, two of the respondents (3%) indicated that campus resources have been beneficial, while off-campus resources have been of no influence. One student explained, “The college’s counseling center has opened me up to therapy and has been beneficial to my academics and mental health. Talking to faculty has also been helpful in understanding that I’m not an odd one out.”

Still other student participants seemed to have no need for resources related to LGBTQ+ support. One respondent (2%) indicated no positive influence from either campus or off-campus resources, while another respondent (2%) highlighted that off-campus resources had been of no benefit. Of the 66 student participants, 29 respondents (44%) did not provide a response. The high percentage of no response to this question could indicate that these participants were unsure

of what resources contributed to their academic success or that they do not utilize campus or off-campus resources.

### ***Safety and Openness on Campus***

Analysis of the open-ended comments revealed that a majority of the participants were confident in revealing their LGBTQ+ identity in the classroom. Several student participants expressed that they felt supported by their professors, and, in most cases, their professors were not interested in knowing their sexual identity. In cases where respondents had to reveal their sexual identities, they did not face any discrimination from their professors. Respondents further indicated that they felt supported by the faculty and staff. One student who identified as LGBTQ+ and cisgender stated:

A vast majority of the offices I go to are safe spaces. While I've only brought up my sexuality to a couple of professors, it's nice to know that they wouldn't judge and that it's not something I have to hide. To those I have brought it up to, it's something that they understand and accept.

Some participants further expressed that they seldom faced stereotyping and felt safe within the campus. One student who identified as nonbinary wrote:

I am just being myself on campus and doing my own thing. Nobody bullies more or stereotypes me as part of the LGBTQ+ community as far as I am aware. I will admit that there may be some problems and I just do not experience/see them.

While it was evident that most LGBTQ+ students in this study felt safe on campus, several of the participants believed that there is a need for the college to be more proactive toward the difficulties encountered by this community. For example, as one participant who did not identify as cisgender but did identify within the LGBTQ+ community explained:

While I can respect that the school is improving over time, there is still ground to cover. For example, my dead name has been used consistently in emails from the school, despite having given them my preferred name on canvas. There are also no accommodations for trans students in the dorms if they were unable to get into the open housing floor, which is especially annoying given the floor is far from full capacity due to the school not giving many trans students roommates. The school also lacks any dedicated support for LGBTQ+ students. Many other universities offer additional scholarship support to LGBTQ+ students. In some cases, they even help to cover HRT [hormone replacement therapy] for transgender students. While personally I can get by without said financial support, its absence is notable.

Another participant who did not identify as cisgender but identified within the LGBTQ+ community explained:

I am housed on the Open Housing Floor, which I believe has a strong community feel and feels much better than being placed on one of the floors with a gender binary. As someone who is still questioning my gender identity, I feel much safer on a floor where I do not have to explain myself and feel comfortable doing something as simple as going to the bathroom. I really wish there were more gender-neutral bathrooms throughout campus, and I have found myself not utilizing public bathrooms on campus due to the need to choose a gendered option. I hope that my desire for community and interaction with those that understand my most obvious differences from others can be fulfilled by living on the Open Housing Floor.



### ***Recognition, Awareness, and Education***

Several participants expressed that the LGBTQ+ community should be given more space and recognition on campus, and that diversity and inclusion efforts on campus should not be limited to race alone. The college has an established Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), which provides support to historically underrepresented communities, including the LGBTQ+ community. However, while the college lists the LGBTQ+ community within the mission statement of ODI, which offers protection under college policy to this community, and provides on-campus programming for underrepresented groups throughout the academic year, these efforts may not address systemic issues discussed by the LGBTQ+ participants in this study. One student who identified as non-cisgender explained:

I believe that there should be a space on campus for LGBT people. The center for diversity and inclusion feels like it is meant only for people who are not white (as it should be) but I know that for myself, as a white person, I do not want to intrude on a space that is only supposed to be for [people of color].

Additionally, 3% of participants complained about the attitude of their professors, expressing events of microaggressions and stereotyping. One student who identified as a woman, but their gender fluctuates, explained:

Many professors act like queer identities are rarities or treat us like hypotheticals that only come up sometimes. Alternatively, we are frequently stereotyped by professors. There are microaggressions that feel too small to bring up every time they occur. Even though we have the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and groups like Common Ground to support us as individuals, the professors undermine any feelings of inclusion in those offers.

Neither participant provided a specific example of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Another participant who identified as LGBTQ+ but did not disclose their gender identity and/or sexual orientation stated, “We also have openly queer professors and even classes that focus on queer topics or that have a part of them dedicated to queer education, but we still have professors who are oblivious to queer issues.” These participant comments suggest that, although there is little indication that students in the study have felt they have experienced discrimination on campus, there is still a need for education and awareness for the campus community regarding LGBTQ+ students. These findings will be further discussed in the next section.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. Overall, faculty, staff, and academic advisors were the most impactful resources for the LGBTQ+ students in this study. Campus resources were influential to participants in their academic progress, and the majority listed a few departments and clubs/organizations that have been utilized by participants in support of academic their success. These results confirm the findings of other studies on the topic. It is widely understood that demand for clinical services at counseling centers has increased over the last several years (Golightly et al., 2017), and that higher education administrators, faculty, and staff acknowledge that counseling centers do not solely exist for the delivery of individual therapy (Pryor, 2021). LGBTQ+ specific counseling services can be critical for creating and improving a welcoming campus climate for this community. As Pitcher, et al., (2018) has explained, although dedicated services to the LGBTQ+ community can increase

costs, institutionalizing LGBTQ+ student support through the creation of LGBTQ+ specific resources can form the basis for long-term, sustained efforts to support LGBTQ+ students.

### **Availability and Access**

The college in this study currently offered a variety of campus resources, such as the Counseling Center, Student Organizations, and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion that provide programming and support to minoritized groups on campus, including the LGBTQ+ community. The Student Activities Office provided a variety of services to student organizations and promoted values centered around civic engagement, experiential learning, inclusiveness, and self-discovery, in addition to others focusing on experience. These resources could offer LGBTQ+ students the support that they need to be successful in their programs of study.

Campus Counseling Services was identified as one of the most-utilized campus resources in the study, along with academic advisors, faculty and/or staff, and student organizations. Regarding counseling services specifically: the availability and access of campus counseling services, in addition to other LGBTQ+ campus resources, are linked to less discrimination experienced and decreased stress in LGBTQ+ college students (Garvey et al., 2018), suggesting that the need for counseling services is expanding, and therefore, institutions need to provide extended and/or additional support to students. Additionally, participants' frequent use of campus counseling services may be interpreted to mean that, while students are utilizing existing resources on campus, there may still be a variety of factors impacting the students' experience, including a lack of designated resources for LGBTQ+ students on campus. With LGBTQ+ college students reporting greater loneliness, depression, and hopelessness than their heterosexual peers (Budford et al., 2021)), and experiencing higher levels of suicide than do

heterosexual students (Marshall et al., 2011), it is important that institutions provide appropriate counseling resources for students.

### **Safety and Support**

Many participants reported feeling confident in revealing their LGBTQ+ identity in their college classrooms and felt supported by their professors. According to Dahl et al. (2019), it is important that support is given to students from academic departments, faculty/staff, and campus environments to improve college-related career outcome expectations for all LGBTQ+ college students.

However, while participants' feelings of safety and support on campus lean positive, Watt (2007) has advocated for the development of social justice consciousness and action among Student Affairs departments. As participants indicated, they felt supported by faculty and staff on campus; however, several LGBTQ+ students believed that there is a need for the college to be more proactive toward the difficulties encountered by this community. This could address gaps in current resources offered to students on campus, and address issues related to inclusivity and visibility within the campus community.

Some participants expressed the need for increased safe spaces on campus for LGBTQ+ students. Despite recent improvements for LGBTQ+ students in higher education, marginalizing policies, and climates for members of that community are still very much present on campuses (Broadhurst et al., 2018). This includes the need to ensure that the campus infrastructure supports LGBTQ+ students on campus, including the need for gender-neutral bathrooms, dormitories that accommodate non-binary genders, and education and training for faculty and staff. Supportive programs and spaces for LGBTQ+ college students should be available to students to best ensure that the campus environment is supportive and inclusive (Camacho et al,

2018) including counseling centers and/or services that are designated for the LGBTQ+ students on campus. As research suggests, inclusive campus policies and programs have a positive impact on the larger campus climate (Cropsey et al, 2016)

### **Education and Training**

Student participants asserted a need for increased education and training for faculty on LGBTQ+ issues, including inclusivity within the college classroom. Analysis of the responses reveals that students not only want but need to be seen as an individual and represented within the institution. College faculty have a crucial role in facilitating change for students and themselves as instructors, and in working as change agents (Gallant et al., 2011). Mayo (2009) has discussed how the exclusion of LGBTQ+ topics within the curriculum can contribute to a negative campus climate for this community.

A small number of participants expressed that the lack of knowledge from faculty in understanding these issues was an area of concern. In response, faculty and staff would be wise to act as LGBTQ+ advocates in order to create a more inclusive college campus. In doing so, faculty and staff would foster change and student development (Kezar, 2010). A way to provide this support to faculty is through increased education and training on inclusive instruction and classrooms. Multicultural competence training (Koch et al., 2018) can provide faculty with the support they need in navigating these issues within the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by three research questions. The first research question asked is: Do appropriate resources have a positive influence on undergraduate LGBTQ+ students? For the 66 students in this study who identified as LGBTQ+, campus resources had a positive influence on academics the majority of the time. Specifically, faculty are one of the most impactful

resources that have provided students support in reaching their academic benchmarks. Included in these resources that have served students positively are academic advisors and counselors. These resources create a safe space for students when they seek academic support and play an integral part in the academic careers of undergraduate LGBTQ+ students.

The second research question asked is: Why do LGBTQ+ specific resources provide this support? This study demonstrates that LGBTQ+ specific resources provided adequate support for the 66 participating undergraduate LGBTQ+ college students. As data from this study suggest, current campus resources may be applicable to LGBTQ+ individuals, but additional education, training, and programming may be needed to better support and provide adequate support on campus to LGBTQ+ students, for example, programming and materials about gender inclusivity. This would offer increased information about gender inclusivity, which would help to eliminate discrimination and neutralize the campus climate. Overall, there is a need for LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for faculty and staff.

The third research question asked is: What do students need and/or want in order to be successful in their programs of study? Overall, participants reported a feeling of support and safety on campus; however, the study's results also suggest that there is a need for increased education and awareness on LGBTQ+ topics among faculty and staff. Additionally, students in the study wanted to be provided more space, increased visibility, and recognition on campus.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the study's qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The first section presented information on research participant demographics. The second section presented information on Campus Support for LGBTQ+ College Students. The third section presented information on respondents' resource utilization and perceptions of available support.

The fourth section presented information on themes and a synthesis and discussion of the research findings in light of the study's three research questions was presented. The chapter closed with discussion of and answers to the study's three research questions. Chapter 5 will draw conclusions, identify implications for practice, discuss the study's limitations, and offer suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to better understand how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) Do appropriate resources have a positive influence on undergraduate LGBTQ+ students? 2) Why do LGBTQ+ specific resources provide this support? 3) What do students need and/or want in order to be successful from their program? After summarizing the study's results, this chapter summarizes answers to the study's three research questions, including reflections from the researcher's life and academic experiences. The chapter offers suggestions for practice and recommendations for future research before discussing the study's limitations and reaching a conclusion.

#### **Summary of Results**

The results of this convergent, mixed-method, survey-based action-research study reveal three common themes.

First, campus resources played an integral role in the academic progress of the study's 66 participants enrolled in an undergraduate program. In this study, 64% of participants disclosed their utilization of campus resources regularly throughout the academic year. Among the resources offered on campus, academic advisors, faculty and/or staff, and student organizations were identified as the most frequently utilized campus resources that aided in academic success. I too have reaped the benefit of resources while enrolled in an undergraduate program, as I utilized campus and off-campus resources during my undergraduate career. The support of the counseling center was pivotal in providing a safe space to discuss barriers to academic success and discovering myself professionally.



Second, resources specific to LGBTQ+ students provided adequate support for undergraduate LGBTQ+ students in the study, although some students desired additional support. Many participants indicated that they utilized their professors as a resource as an LGBTQ+ student. While education for faculty on this topic is crucial, queer representation amongst faculty and/or staff was also included as an important factor contributing to academic success and inclusiveness. I benefited from queer representation amongst the faculty and staff while I was enrolled in an undergraduate program. There was an increased sense of comfort and understanding along with increased awareness of the difficulties encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals in college. These resources provided a safe space and increased self-esteem for me because there was support in place when needed.

Third, although there are some LGBTQ+ specific resources and programming on campus currently, some LGBTQ+ students in the study perceived there to be a need for increased education and awareness on LGBTQ+ topics and more space, increased visibility, and recognition on campus. Many participants expressed concern about their professors' approach toward LGBTQ+ individuals on campus and issues that arise, including incidents of microaggression, discrimination, and stereotyping from professors. I personally resonate with the participants' desire for increased awareness and visibility, and professionally I interact closely with students who identify within the LGBTQ+ community and understand the frustration expressed in our discussions of incidents of discrimination, harassment, microaggressions, and stereotyping experienced on campus. These issues create a barrier to academic success and influence students' performance in academics and extracurricular activities. Often, feelings of doubt, insecurity, and fear are reported by LGBTQ+ college students I interact with because they

express concerns that they have about understanding and acceptance from the campus community, including faculty and staff.

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on the results of the study, I offer three implications for practice. First, LGBTQ+ college students should be provided adequate resources and safe spaces on campus that are specific to the LGBTQ+ community. The development and implementation of a LGBTQ+ specific resource center would be an excellent initiative to provide extended resources beyond current campus clubs and organizations, such as Common Grounds. For example, a Gender and Sexuality Center would provide the college with additional support for LGBTQ+ college students and allow faculty and staff to advocate for increased awareness and education on campus. Additionally, LGBTQ+ specific counseling services could be provided via the Gender and Sexuality Center and/or current counseling centers, and campus counselors could receive additional training and education regarding this community; specifically, on topics such as working with LGBTQ+ undergraduate students and current trends in issues that are dealt with by this community.

The second implication is increased awareness and marketing on campus for LGBTQ+ specific services. This can also include on-campus programming for LGBTQ+ students. For example, including programming and marketing initiatives within the college's strategic plan would institutionalize the inclusion of LGBTQ+ college students through programming and the development of extended services. As Rith-Najarian et al. (2019) found in their study, it is important to bear in mind what services are offered on campus but also how they are marketed to the campus. For example, departments, clubs, and/or organizations dedicated to serving

LGBTQ+ college students could collaborate with the college's marketing department to reach a larger audience and create marketing campaigns that appeal to LGBTQ+ college students.

The third implication is providing training for faculty and staff on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) with LGBTQ+ topics included into the curriculum. This education and training goal is needed to better serve students, to provide an inclusive learning environment, and to eliminate potential barriers to academic success. Providing education and training to faculty and staff can aid in increasing buy-in from campus stakeholders. For example, biannual DEI workshops on topics that include LGBTQ+ education would provide a foundation for faculty and staff in navigating different scenarios they may encounter inside and outside of the classroom.

While there were no specific examples provided, I believe that the faculty and staff at the study's research site need to be provided education and training on LGBTQ+ topics with additional training on how to address these issues when they arise in the classroom and how to appropriately incorporate LGBTQ+ topics into the curriculum and discuss them. The development of awareness through marketing and programming along with the creation of safe spaces on campus would provide an overall inclusive educational environment for students. The implications for practice below should be given consideration as steps are taken to address the issue at hand. Including this process within the campus-wide strategic plan would provide support from campus stakeholders.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the study's results and conclusions, I offer two recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is to extend the current findings by examining what specific topics need to be addressed with faculty and staff via education and training related to LGBTQ+ colleges students' needs. For example, faculty and staff may need training on topics such as

classroom management when working with marginalized groups or understanding bias and implicit bias and how this may transfer to the classroom when working with LGBTQ+ college students. The ability to understand targeted areas for development and the implementation of training would be beneficial; it is crucial in understanding the discrimination, harassment, and stereotyping experienced by individuals who identify within the LGBTQ+ community.

The second recommendation is including interviews with participants in addition to the survey questions. It would be beneficial to include interviews in addition to the survey to provide additional context to responses. Additionally, this would allow the researcher to include additional questions to deepen the understanding of what students need and/or want to be successful in their program of study as LGBTQ+ identifying college students.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The results of this study provide great insight into how campus resources influenced the academic progress of 66 undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. However, the study has three limitations. First, student interviews were not provided as a means of data collection. Interviews would have allowed for a deeper qualitative analysis in understanding the perspectives of the research participants and in answering the study's research questions. Second, I only used a sample of participants from one higher education institution. There would be a benefit to including data from comparable institutions in size and demographics or gathering data from larger institutions to further understand, compare, and contrast how campus resources influence the academic progress of undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+.

A third limitation is the possibility of researcher bias. It is possible to assess for potential researcher bias if the researcher is a member of the group being studied or the researcher has a strong connection with or appreciation for the group being studied (Chenail, 2009). An example

of this is when a researcher unknowingly interprets data to support their hypothesis or by not including data that does not support the hypothesis.

Completely avoiding researcher bias is impossible, but it is possible to reduce researcher bias. I took intentional steps to reduce researcher bias in this study by ensuring that all data obtained for the study was analyzed with a clear and unbiased mind. For example, pre-determined codes were not utilized because I did not want to inadvertently influence the study's data analysis. Also, I shared the data with fellow student researchers and with my scholarly research mentors within confidential settings to ensure that my thinking, reasoning, and conclusions were as unbiased as possible.

### **Conclusion**

This convergent, mixed-methods, survey-based action-research study attempted to enhance the collective understanding of the importance of campus resources for undergraduate college students who identify as LGBTQ+. The study's results underscore three important conclusions: First, there is a need for college faculty and staff to engage in education and training related to the LGBTQ+ community; second, campus resources are integral to LGBTQ+ students' academic progress; Third, LGBTQ+ specific resources, education and training for faculty and staff, and an LGBTQ+ center and/or safe spaces on campus all provide additional support, visibility, and awareness for LGBTQ+ students.

When undergraduate college students who identify within the LGBTQ+ community are provided adequate resources and support on campus, a more concrete foundation develops, which then creates an equitable, equal, and inclusive learning environment. This foundational support is important because institutional policies and resources influence students' well-being, campus experiences, academic performance, and the campus climate. As Woodford et al. (2018)

have explained, LGBTQ+ supportive services and inclusive learning environments are crucial for the well-being and academic success of LGBTQ+ students. It is my hope that the 66 undergraduate LGBTQ+ college students who participated in this study are successful throughout the remainder of their undergraduate careers with the utilization of appropriate LGBTQ+ resources and support on campus.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Title: The Influence of Campus Resources on LGBTQ+ Students  
Principal Student Investigator: Rosa Abbruscato

#### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in an online survey studying how resources influence how undergraduate students who identify with the LGBTQ+ community progress throughout their program of study. To participate in this survey, you must: (1) Be an undergraduate student, (2) Identify as a sexual and/or gender minority, (3) Be actively enrolled in an academic program. The survey consists of 13 total questions and will take 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey is not timed.

#### **WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION REQUIRE?**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete questions based on your academic status, sexual orientation you identify with, gender identity, and internal and external resources utilized. Information provided is anonymous and will be completed through an online secure database.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There are no guaranteed benefits from participating in this study. There is potential for minimal risk, at most, dependent on your response to the survey questions. Certain risks associated with the research is feeling unsupported on campus, and potential risk of re-identification through the demographics. However, your survey response will not include specific identifiable information, and all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and file.

#### **COMPENSATION**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this survey. All surveys are completed on a voluntary basis.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All data collected will be kept confidential. All surveys will be stored on a password-protected computer and file. No one other than the Co-Principal Investigator and the Student Principal Investigator will have access to the data. Once the study is complete, the Co-Principal Investigator will delete the data collected from the protected file.

**HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?**

Results may be presented at meetings, seminars, or conferences, and de-identified data may be published in journals, articles, or used for educational purposes. no specific single subject will be identified, and the data will be reported in aggregate.

**CONTACT**

Questions about this study may be directed to the researcher or research advisor in charge of this study, Rosa Abbruscato, via e-mail at [rabbruscato@mail.bradley.edu](mailto:rabbruscato@mail.bradley.edu). If you have general comments, or concerns regarding the survey questions, conduct of the research, or your rights as a research participant, and/or questions about being a research participant, you may contact the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects office at (309) 677-3877.

**CONSENT**

You are voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study. Your submission of the survey by clicking I Agree below means that you have read and understood the information presented and have decided to participate. Your submission of the survey also means that all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. If you think of any additional questions, you should contact the researcher(s).

☐ **I Agree**

☐ **I Decline**



## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What year of school are you currently enrolled in?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  - e. Graduate
  
2. Do you identify with the LGBTQ+ community?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
3. Do you identify as Cisgender (male or female)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Other (If you would like to disclose and/or define how you identify then, please explain below)
  
4. Do you utilize any resources on campus (i.e., Counseling Center, academic advisors, students' organizations, faculty, or staff etc.) for the support of academic and extracurricular activities?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. Which resources do you utilize on campus? (Please select all that apply)
  - a. Counseling Center
  - b. Diversity and Inclusion Department
  - c. Student Organizations
  - d. Fraternity and sorority life
  - e. Leadership and Service
  - f. Academic Advisors
  - g. Religious Life
  - h. Faculty and/or staff
  - i. Other (Please enter in your answer here)
  
6. How often do you utilize the resources selected in question 5? Please select your answer on a scale of Always (1x/week) Often (1x/month), Sometimes (1x/semester), Rarely (1x/year).

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

- |                                       |        |       |           |        |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------|
| a. Counseling Center                  | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| b. Diversity and Inclusion department | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| c. Fraternity and Sorority Life       | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| d. Leadership and Service             | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| e. Academic Advisors                  | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| f. Religious Life                     | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| g. Faculty and/or staff               | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
| h. Other                              | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely |
7. As an identified LGBTQ+ individual, do you feel there is adequate support on campus for you?
- Yes
  - No
8. Please explain your answer to question 7.
9. Which resources have you utilized thus far in your academic career that have provided support in reaching benchmarks in your academic program? Please explain below.
10. Are there any resources you feel are needed in order to provide more support on campus to LGBTQ+ students? Answer yes or no below and explain.

11. Have internal resources (At Bradley University) or external resources (outside agency, outpatient therapist, etc) contributed to assisting with staying on track? (This is defined by meeting benchmarks in place as outlined in your degree program requirements). Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes, Internal
- b. Yes, External
- c. No, Internal
- d. No, External
- e. Other (Please explain below)

12. Do you feel supported at your current institution as an identified LGBTQ+ student?  
Please rate on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1      2      3      4      5

13. Is there any additional information you would like to include?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS**

Hello, my name is Rosa Abbruscato, and I am a graduate student at Bradley University in the Department of Education. I am conducting research on how resources influence the progress of LGBTQ+ college students throughout their academic program by meting benchmarks in place as outlined and determined by the program requirements, and I am inviting you to participate because you are a student as this university. Participation in this research includes taking a survey about your sexual orientation, gender identify, and use of internal and external resources. This survey will take around 15-20 minutes. If you participate in both the survey and the interview, your total time commitment will be between 25 – 35 minutes.